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MEMORIAL FORESTS

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Communities planning to create memorials want them to have certain attributes. A memorial should preferably be not only lasting but also useful and attractive. That is, it should be something which, by contributing to the health, security and general well-being of the community, will keep alive the tradition of service which characterized the person or group honored. Trees, and especially many trees in a memorial forest, have all of these qualities.

Having life, memorial forests grow and the new growth adds to their beauty and value. They are lasting in character, yielding their products or services to benefit the descendants of those memorialized. Should accident befall the trees, new growth will repair their wounds and heal their scars. Their strong appeal to people of all ages and all classes keeps them always attractive to the community. Living, growing memorials serve to keep alive in future generations the awareness of heroic deeds and services.

The wisdom and success of establishing trees as memorials is demonstrated by the efforts which followed World War I. At its end many communities planted memorial lanes of trees along selected highways -- "Roads of Remembrance" they were called. In some instances each tree was designated as a memorial to an individual soldier. Many beautiful lanes of trees planted at that time bear witness of the fitness of living tree memorials. However, single tree memorials do not completely meet the requirement of permanence. Many things can happen to an individual tree, which is subject to the ills and hazards of all living things. But a forest, with proper care and use, will reproduce itself and live on indefinitely. A forest never wears out. In fact, with age, it increases in beauty and usefulness.

How to Start

The first essential in creating a memorial forest is to insure adequate continuous care and management. Neglect will result in deterioration of the memorial. There must be some public authority or other agency charged with the responsibility of management, if the forest is to succeed. It is important that the ownership of the property be vested in a permanent authority such as the city, village, or county government. A board of trustees or managers should be set up which shall have a continuity of tenure of office. A well-run forest is a long-term business for which there must be uninterrupted policy of management. In this respect there is no difference between a memorial forest and one managed chiefly to produce income.

Another need is adequate financial provision for permanent maintenance. At the time the memorial fund is raised, enough money should be

included in the budget to create an endowment fund. The trustees should have the power to use this money for the continuous protection and improvement of the forest. Into this fund should go the receipts from the sale of forest products and special privileges. An endowment is especially important in cases where the forest is created by reforesting bare land, because of the term of years that must elapse before the forest begins to yield income.

Size and Location

For a municipal forest, 100 acres or more is desirable. It should be readily accessible to the public. For recreational use it should have water, a stream or a lake. Making a pool large enough for swimming and fishing can be considered. A grove of old trees is also desirable for a recreation center.

Planted Forests

If planting of the memorial forest is required, it should be done by the people of the community, as many participating as possible. People acquire a strong personal interest in the forest when they plant the trees with their own hands. A good plan is to have the school children and organized youth groups take part. Helping to create the forest will be educational and inspirational to them. Moreover, such a forest is established mainly for the benefit of the children and their children.

Combining School and Memorial Forests

School forests have a recognized place in our educational system. A great many schools now provide lessons on conservation of natural resources because of the broad educational and cultural values afforded. More than 1000 schools have acquired land on which they have established school forests. These are used as laboratories in which the training and educational background of the children are enriched through practical association with nature. Many of these forests were planted by children who have later served in the armed services. Whether so dedicated or not, the trees are today living reminders of those children. The schools will honor themselves if they dedicate their forests as perpetual memorials to their soldier alumni.



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